

## The Sinlessness of Jesus. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 27 April 2011.

Our Bible text this morning comes from words spoken by one of the two malefactors who were crucified alongside our Lord Jesus ... and spoken to his partner in crime, the other malefactor ... 'We receive the due reward of our deeds; but *this man has done nothing amiss*'.<sup>1</sup>

As you know, week by week we are considering a series of references in the Bible which contain the word 'nothing'. Today, I want to use the malefactor's words, 'this man has done nothing amiss ... this man has done nothing wrong' as a kind of peg, and to think with you of the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus.

And the words of the malefactor provide just one of many testimonies in the gospel accounts to the Saviour's sinlessness.

Let us begin by calling to the witness stand those who knew the Saviour best.

I suppose that, in the truest sense, the One who knew Him by far the best was His Father in heaven ... God Himself. And, if we wish to include God as a witness, we need only listen to the testimony which He gave to the Lord Jesus on two separate occasions ... once at our Lord's baptism, when He (God) looked back over the thirty years of our Lord's life before He commenced what we know as His public ministry ... and once on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration, towards the close of that public ministry ... '*This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*'. And what a testimony that was! As the Saviour Himself once said of the Father, 'I do *always* the things which please Him'.<sup>2</sup>

But I want to focus rather on the testimony given by some of *the men* who knew Jesus best.

As my first witness, I call Simon Peter. As you probably know, the apostle Peter was very much *a man of action*. And it is rather fitting therefore that Peter should write concerning the Lord Jesus that He 'did no sin'.<sup>3</sup> And this, please note, came from the pen of the same Peter who, confronted with the matchless power and person of the Lord Jesus, once said, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord'.<sup>4</sup> But, though very ready to confess *his own* sinfulness, Peter would insist that, unlike himself, his Lord 'did no sin'.<sup>5</sup>

As my second witness, I call the apostle John. And if Peter was the man of action, John was very much *the man of intimacy*. You may recall that it was John who was privileged to lean on Jesus' breast during the Last Supper. And so it is again rather fitting that John, who quite literally had heard the heartbeat of the Son of God, should write of Him, 'in Him is no sin'.<sup>6</sup>

Third, let me call another apostle – one who gave us at least thirteen books of our New Testament ... the apostle Paul. And, if we can speak of Peter as *the man of action*, and John as *the man of intimacy*, we can surely speak of Paul as *the man of intellect and great learning*. And so again it is rather fitting that Paul, whose education gave him extensive knowledge, not only of the writings of his own race, the Jews, but of the writings of the Greek poets and philosophers of his day ... it is rather fitting that Paul should speak of the Lord Jesus as One 'who knew no sin'.<sup>7</sup>

And you will note that the witness of these three apostles is consistent ... they speak with one tongue ... 'He knew no sin, 'He did no sin', and 'in Him is no sin'.

And I cannot help but note that each of these apostles refer to our Lord's sinlessness when writing of His suffering and cross.

So that Peter, having said of Him that He 'did no sin', added, 'who His own self bare *our* sins in His own body on the tree'.<sup>8</sup> And the full quote from John reads, 'He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin'. And, for his part, Paul wrote, 'we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin'.

And I find it interesting that in the narratives which relate our Lord's passion we discover great emphasis placed on His sinlessness – and this coming largely, not from His friends, but from His foes.

In order, we read the testimony of:

(i) Judas the betrayer ... who just before he flung the thirty pieces of silver into the Temple sanctuary, acknowledged to the Jewish chief priests, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed *innocent blood*'.<sup>9</sup>

(ii) Then of Pilate's wife ... who, at a critical stage in our Lord's trial before Pilate 'sent to him (Pilate), saying, "Have nothing to do with that *just man*".<sup>10</sup>

(iii) Then of Pilate himself ... who is on record as having announced no less than three times, 'I find *no fault* in Him',<sup>11</sup> and who ended the trial by washing 'his hands before the crowd saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this *just man*".<sup>12</sup>

(iv) Then, as I read earlier, of the malefactor, 'This man has done *nothing amiss*'.

(v) And, finally, of the centurion who supervised the crucifixion, who 'glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a *righteous man*".<sup>13</sup>

Well, another Easter has come and gone. As you probably know, the Christian Easter is linked closely to the Jewish Feast of Passover, for it was at Passover time that our Lord was crucified and rose again.

And nightfall last evening marked the official end of this year's Passover Festival. And I was fascinated to find that what is called 'The Reading of the Law' in the Jewish 'Service of the Synagogue' for yesterday, the eighth and last day of the Feast, includes the words from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy concerning any sacrifice made to God, 'if it has any blemish, if it is lame or blind, or has any ... blemish whatever, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God'.<sup>14</sup>

The original institution of the Passover took place at the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt almost three and a half millennia ago, at which time God had insisted, 'Your lamb shall be *without blemish*'.<sup>15</sup>

With those words in mind, listen to what the apostle Peter once wrote, 'you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'.<sup>16</sup>

The date today is the 26th April. And it was on 26<sup>th</sup> April in 1962 that the Americans first landed a rocket on the surface of the moon. But, sadly, the spacecraft – known as Ranger IV – failed to send back any of the eagerly awaited pictures, because of, what the BBC described at the time, as 'a technical fault'.<sup>17</sup> Yes, just one 'technical fault' rendered all the sophisticated technology – and all the expense – of no immediate use or value.

And had the Lord Jesus committed just one sin – perish the thought – He would have needed to die for His own sin ... and would have been disqualified from dying for mine.<sup>18</sup> But, thank God, the malefactor had it right. The Saviour had done 'nothing (not even one thing) amiss'. In a life that spanned three decades, our Lord never entertained one evil thought, never uttered one wrong word, and never performed one sinful action.<sup>19</sup>

He was altogether, as another New Testament writer stated it, 'without sin'.<sup>20</sup>

In one of our church services we sometimes sing a hymn written by a lady whose full name was something of a mouthful ... Charitie de Cheney Lees Smith Bancroft. Our hymnbook wisely lists her simply by her first and last names ... as Charitie Bancroft.

Mrs Bancroft's hymn includes the wonderful verse :

When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.  
*Because the sinless Saviour died*  
*My sinful soul is counted free.*  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.<sup>21</sup>

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Luke 23. 34.

<sup>2</sup> John 8. 29.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. 2. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 5. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Peter saw the Lord do many things: 'And we are witnesses of all things which He *did* both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree', Acts. 10. 39.

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 3. 5.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 5. 21.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. 2. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 27. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 27. 19.

<sup>11</sup> John 18. 38; 19. 4, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 27. 24.

<sup>13</sup> He prayed, 'Father, forgive them', but never, 'Father forgive me'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Service of the Synagogue: Passover', page 131, quoting Deut. 15. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Exod. 12. 5.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Pet. 1. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> See ...[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/26/newsid\\_2950000/2950011.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/26/newsid_2950000/2950011.stm)

<sup>18</sup> Solomon acknowledged, "there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). The Apostle John warned, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). But the Saviour was the one exception to Romans 3:10 (none of us are righteous, but He was!). He was the one exception to Romans 3:12 (none of us are good, but He was!). He was the one exception to Romans 3:23 (none of us are sinless but He was!).

<sup>19</sup> Compare His own words, 'the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me', John 14. 30 – and see the notes by F F Bruce and by C K Barrett on the verse.

<sup>20</sup> Heb. 4. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Hymns of Light and Love, number 332.